

Kuwaiti Journal

By Chaplain (Capt.) Gary Ortiz
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How good are you about keeping a journal? I've often been told about the benefits of such a discipline. However, I was never able to keep it up. I suppose the reason was that I had little to write about. That changed when I spent a few weeks at Al Jabbar Air Base in Kuwait. While there, I would look forward to my daily journal entries. The reason being, there was plenty to write about. Things were getting very crowded there when I left, and I'm sure the situation has grown considerably. I wrote about it all. Especially writing about the very human elements to which chaplains are often privy. My Kuwaiti journal has continued up to now mostly because the insights that began there have continued here. Journal entries both there and here include the following:

In Kuwait, the morale and professionalism were quite impressive. Good people tasked with grave responsibilities and handling them with a positive attitude. Communication with loved ones back home surely helped. I was quite impressed with the care the Air Force gives to providing people with phone contact, e-mail accounts, etc. The Learning Resource Center (LRC) also helped to maintain the intellectual development of those deployed. I was impressed with many who took the time over there to make an inventory of their lives in order to make improvements. For some, that meant daily trips to the gym to loose a few pounds and gain the physique they once had. For some, it meant pursuing a degree through the LRC/University of Maryland. For some, it meant mending and improving relationships with loved ones back home. For others, it meant getting re-acquainted with a neglected spiritual life. Many there began going to church again and learning more about their faith. Believe me, being in a place far

removed from our normal reality, a place associated with a potential for harm, has a way of demanding a greater clarity for ones life and vocation. In short, many there reflect on things they were always too busy to reflect on before. The same was true for me.

My Journal entries now lean toward speculation on where we, as a country, may be headed in the long term. Obviously, many are doing the same. For some, that takes the form of firm support for the strong stance the present administration has taken regarding Iraq. For others, it takes the form of protests.

Regarding the latter, someone recently asked about the morale of those deployed seeing so many protesters. His point of reference was Vietnam. Although I was but a child during that particular conflict, I see these protests as a very different matter. The high school in which I work is a case in point. There was a "protest" of sorts there recently regarding the war. It ended, however, with the presentation of a Prayer Blanket. The Prayer Blanket was host to the names of known military personnel deployed in southwest Asia. Opposition to war co-existing with an outpouring of love and concern for those deployed is, perhaps, the biggest difference with Vietnam. No doubt these are troubled times that have caused anxiety for so many. Many will have their opinions.

We as a nation, however, are a people who never cease caring and loving the men and women who have

chosen to serve in this way. How that care and love played out for the troops I was privileged to serve in Kuwait (and PSAB for a week) was powerful. How it will play out for us in the weeks, months and years ahead is a matter for future journal entries. One thing is for sure. The love, care, and faith we, as a nation, have relied on in past conflicts will no doubt get us through the present one. That, I know, will be a part of all my future journal entries.



Air Force photo

Chaplain (Capt.) Gary Ortiz stands in front of one of the Wing's F-16 "Fighting Falcon" on static display for friends and family members to view at last year's Family Day.

"As threats to America change... the National Guard and reservists will be more involved in homeland security, confronting acts of terror [that] our enemies may try to create."

-- President George W. Bush
Feb. 14, 2001